



02/17/22

Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee,

We are submitting testimony on behalf of Creative Interventions, a state-contracted Birth to Three provider. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding HB 5037, An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023. Specifically, we are writing today to testify about the negative impact 5 years of level funding and the COVID-19 pandemic has had on Birth To Three services in our state.

Birth to Three is a program that provides early intervention services to families across CT. In 2020, the 19 Birth to Three programs collectively supported 9,425 infants and toddlers with health impairments, developmental delays, social emotional concerns, and autism spectrum disorders. Birth to Three programs are struggling and are in desperate need of additional funding.

Birth to Three has been without a Cost of Living Adjustment since before 2013 and has been subject to continued flat funding for the past five years with no review scheduled for the next two years. Additionally, no ARPA funds were provided to Birth to Three programs during the pandemic. In comparison, many of our neighboring states have provided rate increases to early intervention programs. For example, Massachusetts' early intervention programs have received a 19.5% increase across the past six years in addition to millions of dollars of COVID relief funds. Virginia's hourly reimbursement rate is 23% higher than CT's, Pennsylvania has received an annual average rate increase of 1.5% for the past 4 years and New Jersey programs received a 5% rate increase in 2021 and a 2.5% increase in 2022.

Birth to Three programs have needed to balance receiving the same pay rate since 2017 while dealing with challenges across the workforce such as increasing salary needs, staff burnout, difficulty with retention and difficulty attracting new clinicians as we cannot be competitive in salary rates when compared to similar private agencies or public schools. To ensure state and federal requirements are met, staff must be highly qualified and receive ongoing training and supervision that currently has no sustainable mechanism for reimbursement. The amount of unreimbursed training requirements for newly hired staff results in a delay to the provision of direct services which leads to a loss of revenue for programs.

Creative Interventions, provides Birth to Three services to over 500 families and we employ an average of 140 employees. We have absolutely felt the strain from the lack of additional funding while trying to keep up with the requirements of taking in new referrals to meet the federal mandate of no waitlists, added training and other unreimbursed requirements, and the loss of revenue from high cancellations due to the pandemic. This has directly impacted our agency as we have made tough decisions about staffing and capacity. We have also dealt with staff turnover due to the amount of expectations for Service Coordinators and the financial effect of cancellations.

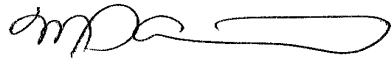
Birth to Three providers have offered solutions to these issues. In the short term, we would like to receive an increase to the monthly General Administrative Payment to \$200 per enrolled child. We ask the appropriations committee to consider providing programs with an interim rate increase immediately and a one-time payment to programs based on enrollment. In the long term, we ask for a revision of regulations to provide predictable rate increases for programs to account for the cost of doing business in Connecticut.

Creative Interventions thanks the Appropriations Committee for your time and consideration of this testimony and is hopeful that the Committee will be in support of the items described above.

Respectfully,

Scott Levine

Scott Levine
CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MS', followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Dr. Melissa S. Saunders, Ed.D., BCBA-D, LBA
Executive Clinical Director

Maris K. Pelkey, MA, BCBA, LBA

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